

IN THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Claims 1-8 (Cancelled):

Claim 9 (Currently Amended): A consulting system for replying to an inquiry from a customer, comprising:

a plurality of clerk terminal-terminals for use by an expert clerk to reply to said inquiry from said customer; and

a connection management apparatus for managing connections, said connection management apparatus comprisescomprising:

monitoring means for monitoring connective status of each of said clerk terminalterminals,

storage means for storing data related to an expert clerk corresponding a connectable expert clerk terminal,

extraction means for extracting said data related to said expert clerk corresponding said connectable expert clerk terminal, and

sending means for sending a list of said data related to said expert clerk corresponding to said connectable expert clerk terminal, to a terminal for use by said customer, so that said customer can select an expert clerk related to said connectable clerk terminal; wherein:

each of said clerk terminals sends data showing that connection is possible to said connection management apparatus when connection with said terminal for use by said customer is ended, and
said monitoring means of said connection management apparatus changes a connective status of said clerk terminal from "connected" to "connectable" based on said data showing connectable.

Claim 10 (Currently Amended): A consulting system according to claim 9, wherein said connection management apparatus further comprisingcomprises:

connecting means for connecting said terminal for use by said customer to an unattended agent server when there is no expert clerk corresponding to an inquiry from said customer;

judging means for judging that a clerk terminal corresponding said expert clerk to reply to said inquiry from said customer has become connectable, referring to said connective status of each of said clerk terminals; [[and]]

changing means for changing connection of said terminal for use by said customer, from said unattended agent server to thesaid clerk terminal of said expert clerk that has become connectable, in accordance with the result of the judgment performed by said judging means, and

sending means for sending communication between said customer and said unattended agent server to said clerk terminal that has become connectable.

Claim 11 (Currently Amended): A consulting system according to claim 9, further comprising:

an unattended agent server which comprisescomprising:
storage means for storing past reply to said inquiry of said customer;
retrieving means for retrieving said past reply corresponding to said inquiry;
and
sending means for sending said past reply to said terminal for use by said customer, in accordance with thesaid inquiry from said customer.

Claim 12 (Previously Presented): A consulting system according to claim 9, further comprising:

a terminal for use by said customer.

Claim 13 (Currently Amended): A consulting method for replying to an inquiry from a customer by using a consulting system having a connection management apparatus for managing connections, said method comprising the steps of:

monitoring connecting status of a plurality of clerk terminals for use by an expert clerk to reply to said inquiry of said customer;
storing data related to a connectable an expert clerk corresponding a connectable expert clerk terminal;
receiving said inquiry;

extracting said data related to said connectable expert clerk corresponding said connectable expert clerk terminal in accordance with said inquiry from said customer;

sending a list of said data related to said connectable expert clerk corresponding said connectable expert clerk terminal to a terminal for use by said customer so that said customer is able to choose an expert clerk corresponding said connectable expert clerk terminal; and

sending said reply to said inquiry data showing connectable to said connection management apparatus when said connection for said customer is terminated,

wherein a connective status of said expert clerk terminal is changed from "connected" to "connectable" based on said data showing from said expert clerk terminal that has become connectable.

Claim 14 (Currently Amended): A connection management apparatus for managing connections between a first terminal for use by a customer and a plurality of second terminal terminals for use by an expert clerk to reply to an inquiry from said customer, comprising:

monitoring means for monitoring a connective status of each of said second terminal terminals;

storage means for storing data related to a connectable an expert clerk corresponding a connectable second terminal;

extraction means for extracting said data related to said connectable expert clerk corresponding said connectable second terminal, in accordance with the said inquiry from said customer; and

sending means for sending a list of said data related to said connectable expert clerk corresponding to said connectable second terminal to said first terminal for use by said customer so that said customer can select an expert clerk related to said connectable second terminal, and

said monitoring means receiving data from said second terminal showing connectable when said connection of any one of said second terminals for said first terminal is terminated, and changing said connective status of said second terminal from "connected" to "connectable" based on said data showing said second terminal has become connectable from said second terminal.

Claim 15 (Currently Amended): A connection management apparatus according to claim 14, further comprising:
connecting means for connecting said first terminal for use by said customer to an unattended agent server when there is no expert clerk corresponding to an inquiry from said customer;
judging means for judging that a second terminal corresponding said expert clerk corresponding to reply to said inquiry from said customer has become connectable, referring to said connective status of each of said second terminals;
and

changing means for changing connection of said first terminal, from said unattended agent server to said second terminal of said expert clerk that has become connectable, in accordance with the result of the judgment performed by said judging means; and

sending means for sending communication between said customer and said unattended agent server to said second terminal that has become connectable.

Claim 16 (Currently Amended): A connection management apparatus according to claim 14, further comprising:

means for setting a priority of consultation of said expert clerk in accordance with the frequency of the past consultation of said expert clerk,

wherein said extraction means extracts said data related to said connectable expert clerk corresponding said connectable second terminal, in accordance with said priority.

Claim 17 (Currently Amended): A connection management method for managing connections between a first terminal for use by a customer and a plurality of second terminal terminals for use by an expert clerk to reply to an inquiry from said customer, comprising steps of:

monitoring a connective status of each of said second terminal terminals; storing data related to a connectable expert clerk corresponding said connectable second terminal;

extracting said data related to said connectable expert clerk corresponding said connectable second terminal in accordance with the said inquiry from said customer; [[and]]

sending a list of said data related to said connectable expert clerk corresponding said connectable second terminal to said first terminal so that said

customer is able to choose an expert clerk corresponding said connectable second terminal;

sending data showing said second terminal is connectable when said connection of said second terminal for said first terminal has become terminated;

receiving data from said second terminal showing connectable when said connection of any one of said second terminals for said first terminal is terminated;
and

changing said connective status of said second terminal from "connected" to "connectable" based on said data from said second terminal that has become connectable.

Claims 18-19 (Cancelled):